

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

HE did not wear his scarlet coat,
For blood and wine are red,
And blood and wine were on his
hands

When they found him with the
dead,
The poor dead woman whom he
loved,
And murdered in her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial
Men
In a suit of shabby grey;
A cricket cap was on his head,
And his step seemed light and
gay;
But I never saw a man who
looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that
went
With sails of silver by.

I walked, with other souls in
pain,
Within another ring,
And was wondering if the man
had done
A great or little thing,
When a voice behind me
whispered low,
"That *yellow* *Is got to*
swing."³⁷

Dear Christ! the very prison
walls
Suddenly seemed to reel.,
And the sky above my head
became
Like a casque of scorching
steel;
And, though I was a soul in
pain,
My pain I could not feel.